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A Memoir

of

Daniel Lathrop Coit

of

Norwich, Connecticut

1754-1833

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THIS story of the life of Daniel Lathrop Coit, compiled by one of his grandsons, is offered to his descendants who never knew him, as a tribute to his memory.

W. C. G.
E. S. G.
L. G. L.

Lowthorpe, Norwich, Conn.
Christmas, 1907.

Daniel Lathrop Coit

A WISE man—was it Plutarch who in his time took many lives?—said "it is a desirable thing to be well descended but the glory belongs to the ancestors."

However desirable it may be to give honor to whom honor is due, it is imperative to limit the number of the ancestors now to be commemorated, lest beginning our family tree, as Lord Chesterfield did, in the garden of Eden with Adam de Stanhope and Eve de Stanhope, we find ourselves burdened with a long list of forbears, of whom it may only be said "they lived and died," a list scarcely more entertaining than the book of Chronicles. The particular ancestor to whom we are now to pay our tribute of honor is Daniel Lathrop Coit.

Nearly fifty years ago, his young-

est son, with a graceful pen, wrote a brief sketch of his life which was read to his children and grandchildren, assembled in his old home, at the Norwich Bicentennial Celebration in 1859. That sketch we cannot hope to improve, but we may extend and enlarge it, not without regret that, as none of his living descendants can supply any personal reminiscences, we can only collect and arrange such scattered fragments of his history as are found in remnants of his diaries, in faded old letters, and in time-stained family records.

Of his English ancestry we know next to nothing, nor is it probable that our knowledge will ever be increased, unless some enthusiastic genealogist with abundant means and leisure shall undertake the pious task of searching for treasures that must somewhere lie hidden in family or public archives in England.

John Coit, the pioneer of all the Coits in this country, came with his

wife and several children from Glamorganshire, Wales, to Salem, Massachusetts, as early as 1638. From thence he removed to Gloucester, where he became a selectman, and there he remained, says tradition, until he was driven off by Indians. He then came to Saybrook, and, in about 1650, with several other men of Gloucester, established himself in New London, where he died in 1659.

His son Joseph came to New London with him and spent the remainder of his life there, carrying on the business of shipbuilding. He married Martha Harris of Wethersfield, was a deacon in the Church and a constable, and died in 1704.

John Coit, son of deacon Joseph and Martha, born in 1670, died in 1744, married Mehetabel Chandler of Woodstock, in 1695. He lived an honorable life and continued in his father's business as a shipbuilder.

Joseph Coit, son of John and Me-

hetabel, born in 1698, died in 1787, married in 1739, as his second wife, Lydia Lathrop, daughter of Thomas Lathrop of Norwich, and sister of the Doctors Daniel and Joshua Lathrop. Joseph Coit's mother Mehetabel and sister Martha, whose note books and letters are in existence, have been fitly commemorated by the great granddaughters of Mehetabel. Following the family traditions he went to Boston at the age of fourteen, to learn to be a shipbuilder, "but likt it not," and having been partly incapacitated by an injury to his foot which "spoilt him for a carpenter" he relinquished the business and went to sea, making nineteen voyages, three before the mast, five as mate, and eleven as master. Subsequently he engaged in various mercantile and commercial enterprises in New London, and was a manager of lotteries chartered by the Colony for public purposes at a time when good men regarded

them as means of beneficence, philanthropy, and grace.

His "daybook," a brief journal of part of his life, now in the Lowthorpe archives, records many pious reflections, his two marriages, the birth of his ten children, his hair-breadth escapes and "remarkable deliverances" from shipwreck and starvation; from lightning when the meeting house was struck, in 1735; and from the smallpox, which he had "so exceeding bad" that it seriously impaired his eyesight and, in his old age, reduced him to almost total blindness.

In 1775, physical infirmities, family ties, and business interests brought him to Norwich, the early home of his wife, where several of his children were already settled. After living for a time in Thomas Leffingwell's house, near what is now the corner of Washington Street and Harland Road, he and his wife made their home in the new house just built by

their son, the subject of this sketch, whose identity is now sufficiently established.

Daniel Lathrop Coit was born September 20, 1754, in New London, where he received an elementary education, and then came to Norwich as an apprentice to his mother's brothers, Doctors Daniel and Joshua Lathrop, who were engaged in an extensive mercantile business, an important part of which was the importation of drugs. A memorandum in his handwriting, dated September 24, 1776, after his apprenticeship was ended, says "agreed with my uncle Daniel Lathrop to continue with him a year at the rate of £80 per annum : he gave me encouragement that whenever business was such that it would be for my interest he would take me into partnership."

Although business prospects during the dark days of the war were far from encouraging, this promise was fulfilled, and he continued to

live on terms of affectionate intimacy with his uncle, Dr. Daniel, and his aunt, Madam Jerusha Lathrop, who, being childless in their advancing years, regarded him almost as their own son.

Under the training of his uncles he acquired excellent business habits, prudence, enterprise, accuracy as an accountant, and great facility as a correspondent, habits that were invaluable in the larger affairs which interested him in after years. Moreover, as they were men of high character and principles, college graduates, "lovers of learning, of good men, and of good things," although he himself had not the advantages of a collegiate education, he was inspired by their influence and example to the acquisition of knowledge of the useful arts and sciences, and the enjoyment of everything that was available in the best English literature.

To be loved by such a woman as

Madam Lathrop "was a liberal education." Her nephew regarded her with filial reverence, and she "fully reciprocating his attachment, spoke of him playfully as her philosophical nephew." Mrs. Sigourney tells us that she herself "thought he was a second Seneca, and always was mute in his presence," but it must be remembered that Mrs. Sigourney was thirty-seven years his junior.

After the death of Dr. Daniel Lathrop, in 1782, Daniel Lathrop Coit continued in partnership with his uncle, Doctor Joshua, under the firm name of Lathrop & Coit, and having extended their business by relations with Coit & Smith of Hartford, and Dr. Thomas Truman of Providence, it was increasingly large and profitable. We read of one shipment from England valued at $40,000, and it was by no means restricted to drugs and medicines but comprised

a great variety of general merchandise.

At the close of May, 1783, he sailed from Norwich for England, partly with the view of enlarging the business connections of the firm, and partly for pleasure and the advantages of foreign travel. His journal records that in going five miles down the river from Norwich, "the sloop got aground only fourteen times," whereupon he went ashore and walked the rest of the way to New London, where he spent the night. The sloop, the "Polly Braddick," came along next morning and having better luck, made a good run to New York, where she arrived after three days. On the seventh of June he embarked on the brig Iris, with nine cabin passengers, all told, including himself and Lynde McCurdy, who had come with him from Norwich, and was his constant companion during a great part of his tour in England.

The incidents of his twenty-seven days' voyage from New York, recorded minutely in his journal, if not in themselves very remarkable, were, to a youthful traveler, inland bred, full of interest and excitement. A century and a quarter has not greatly changed the appearance of the ocean since his time: the whales, and porpoises, and sharks, the icebergs and the gulf stream, as he describes them, are not unlike those seen by them that go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in the great waters to-day: the wind and weather, and the "run" of two hundred and five miles as the highest daily record, were as interesting on the small brig Iris, as they are now on a steamer seven hundred feet long, with a speed record three times as great. But he improved the opportunity to make experiments illustrating the pressure of sea water at various depths down to one hundred and twenty fathoms,

—seven hundred and twenty feet,— and to collate from the "Annual Register" varied information, from the temperature of the gulf stream to improved culture of fruit trees. The habit of keenly observing and minutely recording natural phenomena and mechanical processes was a characteristic of his whole life, and many pages of his commonplace books and letters are filled with his comments and reflections.

He left the brig at the Isle of Wight and went by pilot boat to Portsmouth where he viewed with interest the town with its fortifications and dock yards. Here on the stocks, ready for launching, he saw the ill-fated Royal George, battleship, of one hundred and eight guns, without dreaming that she was destined to sink at Spithead a few years later with a loss of eight hundred lives, for whom has ever since been recited Cowper's requiem, "Toll for the Brave."

After a day in Portsmouth, with Dr. Shepherd and Mr. McCurdy, his fellow passengers on the Iris, they took a post-chaise for London, and found it "a pretty reasonable way of traveling and the most pleasant and agreeable," as indeed it must have been in early June, over good roads where every mile presented new objects of interest. Nothing escaped his attention, the roads, the bridges, the cultivated fields, the hedges and pollard willows, the villages and small towns, the rural cottages, the stately mansions and private parks. He comments on the scarcity of wood for fuel, and gives it as his opinion that "in this country there is a great want of brooks and rivlets." This recalls a remark of one of his descendants that "the great lack of Norwich is lakes!"

The sight of London as he approached it was "overwhelming, and excited wonder and amazement by its magnificence and grandeur." "At

the end of my voyage and journey;" he continues, "I have kept my eyes in so constant exertion in staring and gazing at everything I have seen that they are wearied and really ache for want of rest, for which purpose we alight at the New York coffee house, discharge our postilion and shut ourselves up till, with the help of the barber, hair-dresser, hatter, &c., we are twisted into the appearance and shape of other folks and may venture abroad in an appearance that will not cause greater surprise than we feel ourselves."

His first day in London was given to Westminster Abbey and to Parliament where he found "a great want of order and decorum ; the honorable gentlemen, like a parcel of boys, jumped up and kicked around and out of the room a bundle of papers that had been returned with unacceptable amendments by the Lords !"

Three weeks were fully occupied in seeing the sights of the wonderful

city, and by his business affairs in which his usual caution was manifest to a degree that was somewhat disappointing to his partners at home who realized more than he did the great scarcity of imported merchandise and the urgent demand for it. But as the definitive treaty of peace with England had not been signed, he, on his part, was apprehensive that such serious commercial embarrassments might ensue as would be detrimental to the interests of the firm.

It is difficult to realize at the present day, when an order for a cargo from the ends of the earth cabled in the morning may be countermanded an hour later, that it was then an affair of many months to mail a letter and receive an answer. Truman, for example, received only on October 3, a letter from Coit dated July 11, nearly three months in transit.

Before the month was over, having

had a cold "so severe that he could not remember that he was ever more unwell," and realizing that "this very noisy city is not the place for sick people, the weather being the hottest ever known in London, the thermometer at 87°," he improved the opportunity to set out in a post-chaise for Birmingham with his friend, Mr. McCurdy. The trip was after his own heart and a very full record he kept of it. He saw several great estates on his way to Oxford where he spent two days and was deeply impressed by the college buildings, the paintings and the libraries. Of Blenheim, which he went sixteen miles out of his way to see, he says "nature and art seem here to have combined to reward my pains: nature indeed has been profuse, and art no niggard."

He visited many other magnificent estates and describes them at length. At Stratford he did himself "the honor to sit in Shakespear's chair; the

house is in the middle of the town, very small and mean, with an old stone floor that seemed almost worn out; but as the apartments were not so elegant and numerous as Lord Temple's they were soon viewed, and we gave the girl who was our informer a trifle and left it."

At every important town he visited, the manufactures were of first and unfailing interest. At Woodstock there were steel and gloves; at Birmingham, paper, buttons, bricks and hardware; at Worcester, pottery and china ware; at Clifton, pipeworks; at Bristol, a steam corn mill and a shot factory. A shilling that he paid at Bristol to see a giant, seven and a half feet high, "was not illy spent," but the prevailing custom of tipping servants at inns he thought "ridiculous." On the Sunday he "went to church in the morning, and to meeting in the afternoon and found the preachers not more extraordinary than at home." It is to be regretted

that from Bristol he did not pursue his journey to Glamorganshire, not far distant, and make enquiry concerning Coite Castle, and his Coit ancestry.

In returning toward London he was particularly impressed by "Mr. Shenstone's estate called the Leasowes." He says "it is the most rural and romantic and has the greatest assemblage of natural beauties I have ever seen." Without following his enthusiastic description of the place, it may be observed that he regretted that he had not time to copy all the poetical inscriptions that marked interesting points of view, but he was compensated for this loss by the purchase of Shenstone's poems, in three volumes, with the inscriptions in full.

He made a brief stay at Bath, and in passing Windsor Castle had a glimpse of the King and the royal children, and after an absence of sixteen days arrived in town where he found his business affairs in good

order, his purchases packed and ready for shipment, and also received his first letters from home.

Miss Burney's accounts in Evelina of life in London, Bath, Clifton, Bristol, and of the amusements at Ranelagh and Vauxhall gardens, places that he visited, are quite in accordance with his own descriptions —and it suffices to say that he found the entertainments at the latter places somewhat different in character from anything he had been accustomed to witness on Lowthorpe Meadows or even on Chelsea Parade.

Near the end of August he set out for Holland where he spent about three weeks. Unfortunately, as a considerable portion of his journal is missing, although we know he visited Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Delft Haven and The Hague we are deprived of his account of them. But while he made purchases and formed business connections that continued

for years, the journey as a pleasure trip was not a success. Neither the country nor the inns were comfortable; the people, he found jealous and inhospitable, with less sociability among themselves than there is among the English. At a certain place he desired to procure a carriage, "but so slow and awkward is the Dutch method of doing business, it was an hour before I could get one. In the first place a messenger must be sent for the commissary, who orders a large ship bell to be rung to call together the whole fraternity of drivers, sixteen in number, for the purpose of casting dice to determine who shall have the privilege of getting up his carriage, but lest one ringing shall not muster the whole, it must be rung three times which employed perhaps twenty minutes; by this time the gentry are assembled and ready to cast the lot; after all have thrown the one to whom the lot has fallen posts off for his horses,

which perhaps are feeding in the fields, as was now the case; and after some time he comes with his machine or vehicle of conveyance which is difficult to describe, it being neither coach, chaise or wagon." After a very disagreeable detention of six days, on account of bad weather, at Helvotsluys where he became very tired and anxious to see London, he took the packet for Harwich where he arrived after a rough passage of twenty-one hours.

He quotes elsewhere, apparently with satisfaction, Sir William Temple's description of Holland, as follows: "It is a country where the earth is better than the air, and profit more in regard than honor: where there is more sense than wit: more good nature than good humor, and more wealth than pleasure; where a man would choose rather to travel than to live, shall find more things to observe than to desire, and more persons to esteem than to love."

Instead of proceeding directly to London, as Ipswich was but a few miles out of his course, he went there to seek the acquaintance of Doctor William Coyte, a physician of large practice and independent fortune, hoping to establish kinship with him. Entire stranger though he was, he was cordially received and entertained by the Doctor, whom he found "a very agreeable, pleasant and social man; his wife, likewise, very pleasing, and his daughter very agreeable; in short, an exceeding happy family." "The Doctor's fortune," he continues, "is such as to enable him to live in as affluent circumstances as he could wish. We had an exceeding good dinner of two kinds of fish, a boiled pudding, chickens, mutton, partridges, pigeon pie, and a baked custard pudding, and dessert of pears, nectarines, grapes, plums and hazel nuts, and after dinner the port and sherry passed briskly." He was much in-

terested in the Doctor's extensive botanical garden and noble glass house, and, on the whole, "found him so clever a man and his family so clever" that he wished he might find a more certain proof of relationship than the black eyes, for which the Coytes of England are as noted as the Coits of America.

He was thoroughly used up when he reached London with feasting and the fatigue of traveling by stage coach, but he soon rallied and resumed his pleasant occupation of sight seeing. At Drury Lane theatre "The Tender Husband" was well acted and went off with great eclat. He was also much entertained by "Othello, one of Shakespere's masterpieces, exceedingly well done, and well worth seeing."

He describes as one of the greatest wonders he had seen in England the famous brewery of Thrale and Company. This was not far from the time when Dr. Johnson, as one of

Thrale's executors was preparing to sell the brewery, and said, "we are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice."

He also witnessed, a few days later, the imposing ceremonial of the proclamation of peace between England and the powers with which she had been at war, a noteworthy event celebrated with great pomp in a formal manner by a procession with heralds to the City.

His Guide Book in London, published in 1782, called "the Ambulator, or Stranger's Companion," purported to describe "whatever was remarkable either for Grandeur, Elegancy, Use or Curiosity within the circuit of twenty-five miles." That he made good use of his "ambulator" and his opportunities, is certain, but we may not follow him too closely, for many years of his life are yet before him and us.

On October 25 he set out for Paris via Dover and Calais and spent about six months in France, sight seeing of course, in Paris; and in the study of the language at Abbeville. He was favored with the acquaintance of Doctor Franklin, then our minister in France, and of the Marquis La-Fayette, lately returned from his American campaigns, and continued his friendly intercourse with Colonel Wadsworth and his son of Hartford.

He was greatly interested in witnessing the first successful balloon ascension made by Messrs. Robert and Charles from the gardens of the Tuileries in December, 1783. To his uncle, Dr. Joshua, he wrote, "I have written my father (the letter was printed in the Norwich Packet), an account of the new Flying Machines, or Balloons as they are called, and refer you to him for a description. The novelty of men's flying in the air with great facility to any distance will doubtless afford surprise.

I doubt not you have heard before of the machine but not of the Aerial Voyage which has been made in this one, and which I have witnessed." But that he was not fully convinced of the ultimate success of the experiment appears in a letter from his friend, Dr. Coyte of Ipswich, who says, "I was much pleased with your account of the balloon, and think with you, that for want of steerage it is a matter that must be of no consequence and will fall to the ground neglected and disregarded." From that day to this balloons have risen and "fallen to the ground," and the problem remains unsolved, though the inventor of the Bell telephone is still confident that within the present year he will demonstrate the entire practicability of his plans.

Early in March he returned to London, and after about seven weeks embarked on the ship Ceres for America. Nothing of greater interest than the usual vicissitudes of

wind and weather occurred on the voyage, except an exchange of courtesies with a French fishing vessel off the Banks of Newfoundland, which gave in barter for a dozen of porter and a cheese, some fine fresh fish and a "hollowboat," which, being alive when they came on board and immediately cooked, were the finest he ever tasted.

On Friday, June 4, 1784, he landed in Boston, and after calling on his friends and relatives, the Greens and Hubbards, he found himself in Norwich in a little more than a year and a day from his departure.

To a bright, intelligent young man, old enough to know what he wanted to see and do, yet young enough to enjoy it, this year of foreign travel was full of pleasure and profit and instruction. He did not go as far or as fast in twelve months as the tourist now travels in thirty days; yet the post-chaise and the diligence gave opportunities for seeing and

knowing the country and the manners and customs of the people that are not afforded by automobiles and limited express trains.

He was doubtless a marked man in Norwich after his return, for, says John Fiske, "even in a town as large as Philadelphia at that time, an American who had crossed the Atlantic was sure to be pointed out in the street 'as a man that has been in Europe.'"

His comments on England are not uninteresting: "The constitution of Britain seems to be like the body of an infirm man laboring under a complication of disorders which cannot be cured, but must by and by destroy it. The State seems to have many evils to cure without power to destroy any. The nation is sunk into an amazing debt the interest of which is enormous tho' absolutely necessary to be paid. The civil and military establishments call for great supplies and more than can be spared.

The septennial parliament I think a grevious burden and introduces venality, bribery and corruption, which would be much less the case were the members chosen annually. Robbery, thieving and murder are carried to a great height, and executions very numerous. Smuggling, in consequence of prodigious duties, is at a great height, so that whole bands go armed and sometimes abuse officers of the customs. Dr. Price says, the dissenting interest in the country is in a declining way, and assigns the cause in some measure to the Methodists who are increasing :— many Methodists join them."

So also, from Paris to Dr. Joshua Lathrop: "The air of Paris is vastly better than that of London, but I don't like the city as well. It is, however, a great and magnificent place, very rich and opulent, though it has but little trade. The country in general is good, tho' I think inferior to England. The principal

part of the Business of this place seems to be Pleasure, if that can be called Business : but the Pleasure of London seems to be Business, and great as are the two extremes they are not greater, or rather the difference between them is not greater than the difference between the inhabitants of the two places. This place seems to be supported by foreigners who flock here to spend their money and enjoy the amusements of the place, but one is surprised that that, added to the little business done here, should be sufficient to support such numbers in the style of affluence they live in."

He was now thirty years old, and his return to his native land may be said to mark the close of the first period of his life.

He resumed his residence in Norwich with his aunt, Madam Jerusha, and continued in partnership with his uncle, Dr. Joshua, until the latter withdrew from active business.

He then formed a new partnership which continued for ten or twelve years, with his cousin and future brother-in-law, Thomas Lathrop. The correspondents of the firm sent their compliments and congratulations "to the good old gentleman" on his retirement, adding that their "personal knowledge of Mr. D. L. Coit had given them a high opinion of his character," and expressing their willingness to continue relations with the new firm "doubting not that Mr. Thomas Lathrop is also respectable."

At this time his brother, Thomas, an active man of business; his sister, Elizabeth, wife of Christopher Leffingwell; his sister, Lucy, wife of Andrew Huntington; his sister, Lydia, wife of William Hubbard, were all living in Norwich; his brother, Joseph, after receiving his business training from his uncles had recently established himself in Hartford; and his brother, Joshua, a

distinguished lawyer, member of the Legislature and member of Congress was living in New London. His Lathrop kinsfolk at Lowthorpe were numerous; the Huntington family connection was large and friendly, while at the Landing, in a beautiful situation at the mouth of the Shetucket, with gardens sloping to the water, the large family of sons and daughters of Captain Ephraim Bill extended his circle of friends.

Whether it was before he went to Europe that he was specially attracted by the charms of a daughter of the house, then a young girl of seventeen, is a matter for conjecture; nor did she ever tell precisely when she became conscious of his attachment, as, in presenting a rose to her after carefully removing the thorns, he ventured to hope that it might be his privilege to remove all thorns from her path in life. But we do know that from London he wrote to his uncle, Joshua, that he was buy-

ing window-glass, hinges, door-locks, nails, and-so-forth, with the view of building a house on his return. Thus it was, then, as now, that coming events cast their shadows before, even through window glass!

In accordance with this purpose, in 1785, he built the house on the hill, near the Coit elms, planted there five and thirty years before, and to this house, in November, 1786, he brought as his bride of nineteen, Elizabeth Bill, daughter of Ephraim and Lydia (Huntington) Bill. Lydia was the daughter of Joshua Huntington, and sister of General Jabez Huntington, the father of five sons not less distinguished than himself.

The year 1786, as has been seen, was the beginning of a new and interesting era in his life. Happily married and settled in his new home, his aged parents living under his roof, he himself at the head of the business with which he had long

been connected, the auspices, so far as he was personally concerned, were full of hope and promise.

Not so, however, with the country at large. The treaty with England had indeed been signed, and the United States were nominally at peace with all the world, but there was as yet no settled government; the Constitution was not adopted till 1787; President Washington was not inaugurated till 1789; internal jealousies and dissensions were prevalent; New York and New Hampshire were quarreling about the possession of Vermont; New York was seeking to impose tariff laws against New Jersey and Connecticut: Pennsylvania and Connecticut were carrying on a sanguinary conflict, the so-called "Pennamite war," over territory claimed by each in the Valley of the Susquehanna; a fierce controversy raged as to the location of the proposed national capital; the finances of the country were in a deplorable

condition ; the vast territory west of the Seaboard states was unsettled and unexplored, and the western frontier was constantly menaced by savage Indian tribes: while in Europe, the appalling sounds of the French Revolution were heard, the short-lived Republic came into existence and the rising star of Napoleon, of evil omen, appeared in the sky.

But none of these things dismayed him. Was foreign commerce embarrassed by French and English depredations on the sea, did the embargo check all enterprises at home, he pursued the even tenor of his way, sensible that as reverses and misfortunes were inevitable they must be accepted with patient fortitude.

After the termination of his partnership with his cousin, Thomas Lathrop, he began to close his mercantile business in Norwich, and early in the new century was practically out of it. He sold the residue

of his stock of drugs and medicines to Doctor Dwight Ripley, the father of a large and highly respected family of sons and daughters, of whom Judge George Burbank Ripley married Hannah, daughter of Thomas Lathrop.

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As early as 1796, he had become interested as an original subscriber in the Connecticut Land Company, in the Western Reserve in Ohio. He also inherited from his father an interest in the so-called "Sufferers Land," or "Fire Lands," set apart by the State of Connecticut in the western part of the Reserve for the indemnification of her citizens who had suffered losses by the fires kindled by Benedict Arnold and the British General Tryon in the Revolutionary War.

His own proprietary interest by purchase and inheritance, and the management of property entrusted to him by others made incessant demands upon his time and atten-

tion in correspondence and personal visitation, as long as he lived. The purpose of the proprietors was of course to cause the land to be explored and surveyed and sold as soon as possible at reasonable prices to actual settlers. That he might be fully informed, although he never resided in Ohio, he made five journeys thither, remaining for considerable periods. His first journey in 1801 on horseback through the mountains of Pennsylvania to Pittsburg and thence north to Cleveland was not without peril. At times, like Goldsmith's Traveler, he must have found himself remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow, in his tedious journey of seven hundred miles, but he made light of his adventures, and writing to his wife says, "we have taken possession of the 'Land of Canaan.' The worst Hittites and Jebusites are the woods and forests to be cleared,—no wolves, bears, or rattlesnakes!" But so rapidly came

improvements in traveling that twenty-five years later, accompanied by his wife, he made the journey from New York to Cleveland by steamboat and the recently constructed Erie Canal. The canal of course interested him greatly, recalling his observation of canals in Holland more than forty years earlier, and he did not fail to notice the use of natural gas at Fredonia, New York, —a novel sight, at that day.

This property was at times a heavy burden by reason of the difficulty of making sales to desirable settlers, and the greater difficulty of securing payments, and effecting remittances by safe conveyance when the mails were slow and irregular, and the finances of the country were in a most precarious condition.

In 1801, Mr. Coit was urged by his brother-in-law, Joseph Howland, a merchant of large affairs in Norwich, to engage with him in a new enterprise in which he had become inter-

ested on the Hudson River where he had purchased for $63,000 more than three hundred acres of land, part of the ancient Phillipse Manor, now the City of Yonkers. On this estate was the mansion house with several other dwellings, barns, shops, a sawmill and a flouring mill. It was proposed that Mr. Coit should remove with his family to New York and undertake the purchase of wheat and the sale of the flour to be manufactured by Mr. Howland at Phillipsburg, where the sawmill river afforded sufficient water power and where transportation to New York was easy by boat or by land carriage.

Writing to his wife from Ohio, Mr. Coit said, "I have told brother Howland I will endeavor to leave my mind open for conviction, and perhaps it will be better for you to do the same, and regard the proposition with a suitable degree of attention:" —and again, a month later, "was it ten years earlier in life, and was it

not for the unhealthfulness of New York, I should be tempted to follow suit."

He did consider it for a year, and, finally, under advice of his friends, he yielded to Mr. Howland's very flattering proposals, and, renting his house under the elms and leaving his three elder children to attend Mr. Hale's school at Lisbon, went to New York with his wife and the three younger children, Maria, Eliza, and two-year-old Joshua, early in May, 1802. We can imagine their feelings as they went down the river leaving their beautiful home. "It is a perplexing business," he wrote, "I wish it was over, or had never been thought of." Again: "I feel like a cat in a strange garret, in New York:" and, a few months later, "I am a little more at home, but not pleased with the bustle of New York."

The family occupied a pleasant house in Washington Street, near Cortland Street, at that time a de-

sirable place of residence, near to Mrs. Aspinwall, Mrs. Woolsey and Mrs. Levi Coit, his wife's nieces. His place of business was perhaps half a mile away on South Street, between Coenties Slip and the Battery, then, as now, the great landing place for vessels with grain and flour. But the proximity of Washington Street to the North River exposed the family to great inconvenience at high tides, when a foot or two of water on the kitchen floor was not conducive to health or comfort. After a year they removed to a better situation on Broadway near Reade Street and the City Hall, but the prevalence of yellow fever in the summer of 1803 compelled the removal of his family to one of Mr. Howland's houses at Phillipsburg,—an agreeable change for his wife who thus became the neighbor of her sister, and for the children who had all the freedom that such a pleasant residence could give.

Two years' experience satisfied him that financial results would not compensate for the sacrifices he was making, and he was happy to re-establish his family in their old home in May, 1804, he, himself, remaining "amphibious," as he said, for a few months, pending the settlement of his business in New York.

It was in this summer, soon after the Fourth of July, that the city, and indeed the whole country, was shocked by the murder of Alexander Hamilton in a duel with Aaron Burr. His account of the prevailing excitement, which he personally witnessed, is of special interest. "The business," he says, "causes great agitation, and in my humble opinion is a proof that great men are not always wise."

It was at about this time that Jerome Bonaparte and his bride, who was Miss Patterson, of Baltimore, arrived in New York, "with the expectation of sailing immediate-

ly for Europe. Unfortunately, however, for the little great man and his Lady, an English frigate and a sloop of war, sent, I suppose, from Halifax to escort them, came and placed themselves alongside of them, and since, 'tis said, another English sloop of war is at the Hook, so that Monsieur and his suite have again returned on shore where they will probably remain until they get aid from their unpleasant condition."

After returning to Norwich, where he passed the remainder of his life, he did not again embark in the hazards of commerce, his most important business interest being in his Western lands. But he was far from idle, and, as he wrote to his friend, Governor Huntington, of Ohio, "employment of almost any kind is in my estimation one of the first requisites to happiness."

Although he was not prone to rash speculation he was not unwilling, after careful investigation, to make

moderate investments in new ventures that interested him. Thus the "old tan lot" on the hill above his house was long remembered as the place of his experiments in making leather. So also, having a salt spring on his land in Ohio, he encouraged his son, Henry, to engage in its manufacture there, and, as his commonplace books show, carefully studied the subject and after seeing the process at Rochester, on Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts, believed it might be not only possible but profitable to obtain salt by evaporation of sea water on Long Island Sound or even on the Thames River.

In 1796, with others, he was interested in forming a library company in Norwich and acted as its secretary. The original subscription list, and invoices and a printed catalogue of books purchased from Isaac Beers, bookseller, of New Haven, have come down to us. The titles, ranging from grave to gay, comprise

many excellent books, such as no gentleman's library should be without, and that are readable to-day, but they have been scattered and no remnant of the collection can be found. Among them were the Rambler and the Spectator; "the graver English poets," Thomson, Young, Pope and Cowper; Miss Burney's Evelina and Cecilia; Sir Charles Grandison, seven volumes; the Encyclopædia, eighteen volumes; Gibbons' Rome; and the British Theatre, fifteen volumes. He had already, while in London, made purchases for his own library from Mr. Longman, the publisher, with whom he was on friendly terms. He also consigned for sale to Mr. Beers, a lot of medical books, probably from the library of his uncle.

"At one time, the production of raw silk he thought might be available and with this view he carefully studied the modes of culture and manufacture abroad and in this

country and procured experienced persons to raise one or two crops of the silk worm on a sufficiently large scale under his own inspection, having fortunately for the experiment an ample supply of the proper mulberry trees at his disposal." The result was not altogether unsatisfactory, and he sold his silk at a fair profit, but, he remarks, "while in a family among farmers the business might be carried on advantageously by children and women, at times when little else would be done, it would be difficult to manage an extensive manufacture of this kind when so much labor is required at times, for short periods only, and afterwards no employment."

In connection with his son, Daniel, who resided for some time in New Jersey for the purpose of procuring quercitron bark, largely used by dyers and tanners, he engaged in the business of drying and grinding the bark, for which his old tan bark mill

was available; but, desiring something better, he caused a new mill, specially adapted to his purposes, to be constructed after his own design at Hudson, New York, and made large shipments of the ground bark to New York and London where for a time it yielded a handsome profit.

In the year 1802, together with a few friends, he organized the Norwich Sealing Company and fitted out two vessels, the Miantonomo and the Oneco, at considerable expense, for a voyage round Cape Horn to the northern Pacific, their ultimate destination being a port in China with a cargo of seal skins. Some idea of the risks to be incurred and of the profits anticipated is suggested by his willingness to pay a premium of twenty-five per cent. for insurance. Unfortunately, the vessels, after taking on board more than seventy thousand seal skins, were seized and detained by a Spanish vessel on suspicion of having been engaged in

traffic with an English cruiser. In a compromise settlement the underwriters paid as for a partial loss, but not till twenty-three years later did the United States government, which in behalf of the owners and insurers had demanded indemnity from Spain, finally adjust the claims.

If none of these ventures, nor others that might be named, yielded much profit, on the other hand they resulted in little loss, and afforded agreeable and interesting occupation. After he had duly weighed and considered a business proposition he accepted the result philosophically quite undisturbed by adverse fortune. "I am sorry for the loss," he said, "but it cannot be helped." "Reverses must be expected and prepared for in business." "Uninterrupted good fortune cannot be looked for."

Enterprise, and interest in new schemes were balanced by prudence and foresight, and through all the chances and changes of his varied

business experience, and, indeed, in all the vicissitudes of life his predominant characteristic was equanimity.

In 1808, his friend, Joseph Howland, who was then living in New York became seriously embarrassed in his affairs by the disastrous failure of Jesse Brown & Son, merchants in Norwich. Mr. Howland was largely interested in real estate in detached pieces in Norwich, New London and Montville, and having made an assignment to his sons-in-law, residents of New York, they found it difficult to manage the property at that distance, tied up, as it was, with leases, mortgages and attachments. They therefore entrusted the business to Mr. Coit as their agent. He found it anything but a sinecure, requiring close personal attention to details, correspondence and litigation, and calling for all his tact and business experience for several succeeding years.

Thus, although he was nominally "out of business," his advice and assistance were in constant requisition by his friends and neighbors, so that it may be said no small part of his vocation was in "helping when he met them lame dogs over stiles."

In 1818 by a fall from a ladder while he was picking grapes, he fractured his right thigh bone near the hip joint. The accident was indeed serious and disabled him for more than a year, but improvement came slowly and he was able to make several journeys, on one occasion to Massachusetts, with Mr. Gilman and one or two other friends, where they visited the great cotton mills at Taunton and Waltham, which were particularly interesting on account of the new manufactories then being established at the Falls. "At Plymouth, which it has become quite fashionable to visit, we were gratified by seeing the cradle of our New England settlements, and had the

pleasure, too, to place our feet on the famous Rock that first received the footsteps of the fathers."

He also tells of another occasion when, as he was driving home alone from Vermont where he had landed interests, he was arrested at Bolton, Connecticut, and detained and fined for travelling on the Sabbath day! This seems remarkable in these days when automobile cars rush madly over the country with terrific noise seven days in the week,—and yet there are good men who use these and other uncanonical means of locomotion for their Sabbath day's journeys of business or pleasure, maintaining that the world is growing better! This was certainly the opinion of the good lady who was asked if the first day of the week was as well kept as it had been in her younger days.

"No," was her reply, "the Sabbath is not as well kept, but the rest of the week is kept much better."

It was also after this accident that he made his fifth journey to Ohio to which reference has already been made. Describing his proposed route, in a letter to his son, he said, "Thus, you see, we have employment for considerable part of the summer from which we hope for considerable amusement; and innocent amusement, at our time of life, is about the whole that is left us. I don't know that we could do better."

But after five serene and happy years it was his misfortune in November, 1831, to meet with another serious accident. He had spent the evening as was his custom, in reading aloud to his wife, a custom, which she said, gave her great pleasure. At the usual hour he took a candle and was about to bank up the fires and lock up the house for the night, when his foot caught in the rocker of her chair, and, unable to extricate himself, he fell heavily to the floor and again fractured his right thigh.

He knew perfectly what had happened, and calmly directed what should be done until Mr. Gilman and the doctor were summoned.

From this accident he never fully recovered, but his letters describing it and the former accident, and the serious illness that followed, display not only his close observation of details, but wonderful serenity and patience, and thoughtful consideration for his anxious friends.

Writing to his son, December 22, 1831, he said, "I have no pain in the limb, save, occasionally, a rheumatic affection. It is a rule with me, you know, to endeavor to draw all the benefit from misfortune that it admits of, and on the present occasion not a small consolation is derived from the consideration that the misfortune at your period of life would have been greater. I have now nearly run my race, and without this accident a few quiet and peaceable years were all I could rationally hope

to enjoy, and as active exertion is not absolutely necessary, and books afford me amusement, I may still hope for them, if it please the Supreme Ruler of all events to grant them."

Nothing could be more beautiful in domestic correspondence than his letters to his children, beginning when the youngest was not two years old, and the eldest was scarcely more than fourteen, and continuing until a few days before the close of his life, —letters of tender, fatherly counsel, of solicitude for the welfare of each one of his children, enlivened occasionally with gentle humor, and, as years went on, becoming more and more free in expressions of affection.

When his two elder sons went to New York to engage in business, he watched their careers, not without solicitude, sympathizing with them in their perplexities and gratified with their prosperity. His youngest son, Joshua, a graduate of Yale, es-

tablished in New York as a lawyer, had a life of uninterrupted success in his profession, to the entire satisfaction of his father.

When his eldest son, Daniel, after many years of isolation and close application to business in South America, had attained great prosperity, he was delighted, not so much because his son had made a fortune, as because of the warm commendations he received from his business friends and associates. Writing to him, July, 1825, he says:

"I have long and with much solicitude sought for some intelligence in your letters relative to the satisfaction you may have afforded your friends in London, and now it comes in full tale. The extracts from the letters from Messrs. Huth & Co. and Mr. Huth individually, who could not be satisfied with the testimony of the house, but must add his own personal declaration to manifest his perfect satisfaction and his testimony

of cordial esteem and perfect gratification, are, indeed, such a treat to me I want words to express. Nothing short of your own personal health and welfare, could be half so gratifying, and although I have gone along with you in all your trials and success with great interest, yet there seemed to be something wanting till I could know that your proceedings gave entire satisfaction to those kind friends who had placed such unlimited confidence in you. The gratification I experience from this circumstance can only be estimated by your own sensations on the receipt of those letters; and more, I am sure, I need not say."

And again, May 10, 1826 (after Mr. Perit's return from Europe), he wrote, "I have been delighted with Mr. Perit's account of the estimation that your friends, Messrs. Huth & Co., entertain of you, and all your management of the vast concerns you have had on hand. For this I

had been prepared by your own communications and copies of the testimonials they had given you, but this is a renewal and confirmation of all and is highly pleasing to me."

His son, Henry, at an early age, married and settled in Ohio where he became a large land owner, and conducted numerous enterprises with great zeal, and with considerable success.

In 1811, his eldest daughter, Lydia, was married to Professor James L. Kingsley of Yale College. Her father's letters, and his not infrequent visits, indicate his warm affection for her, and his gratification at the excellent standing of her sons, at school and in college. One of his letters to the youngest son, in a kind and playful style, is still preserved by "Master William's" grandchildren.

His daughter, Maria, in 1823, became the wife of Pelatiah Perit, a native of Norwich, and a long-time

resident and prominent merchant of New York. With this daughter, his correspondence was continuous, the last letter he wrote being addressed to her. In his letters to Daniel he speaks in high terms of Mr. Perit: thus, "He cannot be known anywhere without being esteemed." "I do not speak without reflection in saying that I believe few men in New York are held in higher estimation." "Few commercial houses in New York stand on so commanding ground as Goodhue & Co., and our friend, Mr. Perit, does honor to the establishment and himself wherever known."

His youngest daughter, Eliza, who was married in 1820 to William C. Gilman was the only one of his family who continued to live in Norwich. At an early period he became attached to her husband, and, before her marriage, in proposing him as a trustee of the Erie Company, he wrote to General Perkins, "The

person whom I have in view is a young gentleman living in town by the name of William C. Gilman : he is a good accountant, a ready penman, and an amiable man, and on my own account desirable, as he is like to become one of my family."

Writing to Daniel, in South America, he says, "I could wish you had been better acquainted with this brother-in-law of yours, for I want you to love him as much as do the rest of his acquaintance." And, again, "We have much satisfaction from the attention of Eliza and her very good husband, who are as pleasantly settled as at any house in town, and whose prospects are as good as most."

He was greatly interested in the building of their new house, and describing its pleasing situation in detail to Daniel, recommends it as a subject worthy of his pencil. After his second accident, "William and Eliza" occupied the Thomas house,

with their children, in order to be near him. He wrote to Maria, in December, 1831, "This good brother and sister of yours do everything in their power to smooth the latter end of our path through life, and apparently with as much satisfaction as if it was their own on which they were bestowing the attention."

And in March of the following year, writing to the same, "Our neighbors on the hill (the Gilmans) continue their constant attention and kindness. Yesterday we dined with them and I walked home on crutches. Greatly as the necessity of their attention has lessened we shall hardly know how to part with them. But I find I touch a tender cord which easily vibrates; the tear starts, and, though I say this to one of them, I cannot refrain from saying, O, How are we Blessed in our Children!"

At a time when it seemed probable that Mr. Gilman might be induced by better business prospects to leave

Norwich, he wrote, "I need not say how much we shall be affected by his leaving us, for with all his kindness and attention he has caused us to lean upon him, — perhaps too much."

And to his son, —

"We have great satisfaction, my son, in the connections which all your sisters have formed. I believe it is a rare instance that all the females of a family have been so fortunate."

"There is much reason for satisfaction, my son, in the present circumstances and prospects of our family and I hope there may be no want of grateful sensations on that account."

It is to be wished that these extracts might be supplemented by an ample selection from his letters, printed verbatim. They are, unconsciously to himself, his autobiography, not edited and revised for publication, but proclaiming him as a

man who had "a right judgment in all things." They contain not a syllable that might have been better omitted, not a word of unkindly comment on the men or affairs that he spoke of freely in the confidence of domestic and friendly correspondence. He had nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing to conceal.

Had he then no faults? If he had any, they were known only to his own conscience and to his Maker. After carefully scrutinizing these letters, "the Accusing Spirit," might give them in at heaven's chancery without a blush, and "the Recording Angel" would find not a word to be "blotted out with a tear."

He was not unconscious of the physical infirmities that rested heavily upon him in the last two years of his life, nor did he attempt to conceal them from himself or his friends, but it was his endeavor to bear them with such cheerful fortitude as would relieve those who were about him, as

far as possible, from undue solicitude. Writing to his daughter whom he sometimes addressed as "My dearly beloved Maria," he said, "But your troubles did not cease it seems when you reached the steamboat which was so very much crowded. We are frequently reminded that we are not to expect unmixed enjoyment in any station or employment: amidst constant changes it would be strange if we did not at times get jostled and experience some inconveniences, which, after they are over, are partially made up by the pleasure we have in laughing at them, provided they are not of too serious a nature, such as losing our baggage and having to return twenty miles for it; or getting a serious fall, and breaking a limb that will take a twelve month to mend it! Now I think the tendency good to reflect in the midst of our petty disquietudes, how much worse they might have been, and draw all the consolation possible from

misfortunes that they admit of. I do not think our good friend, Mrs. C., exactly calculated to seek much for this sort of consolation. She is alive to the evil, and determined to regard it as such to its full extent, without favor or affection, while her daughter, if I mistake not, would rather laugh it off, and make light of it!"

It was at no time his custom, as it was of some excellent men and women of his day, to speak and write freely of his own inward spiritual and religious convictions. He was one of those "who owned the covenant," and all his children were "admitted to baptism" in the first church of Norwich; yet possibly, some of his friends wished that he was less reticent. Be that as it may, however desirable it is that a man shall confess with his mouth, it is still better to believe in the heart, and, inasmuch as he lived a godly, righteous and sober life, so it cannot

be doubted that he was gathered to his fathers having the testimony of a good conscience, in favor with God and in perfect charity with the world.

The words of his son, Joshua, have already been freely quoted, and borrowing from them once more this memoir may now fitly be closed.

"In his social and domestic relations his character was singularly attractive and exemplary. Thoughtful and unwearied in preparation for every duty, he was resolute and firm in execution. Unassuming and punctilious in rendering to every one the dues and courtesies of life, nothing could surpass his forbearance and indulgence for the failings and weaknesses of others; while his disinterestedness, his sincerity, his freedom from prejudice, united with a judgment ripened by a wide intercourse with mankind, gave a weight and sanction to his counsels that were

often sought and were unobtrusively rendered.

"In politics, he was a federalist of the old school, satisfied that our form of government was the one best adapted to our circumstances, only requiring to be administered by upright men, and in such a manner as to interfere as little as practicable with the legitimate pursuits of the private citizen. But he took no active part in public affairs further than in systematically voting at elections, and serving two terms in the office of Representative in the State Legislature; obligations he considered equally due by the citizen to the public when called upon, for himself preferring the repose and unobtrusive pursuits of private life.

"He had the satisfaction to survive until he had seen all his six children established in life; and he died on the 27th of November, 1833, in a ripe old age, before time had impaired the powers of his richly

stored and disciplined mind; with the consolations of a firm, religious faith, not presumptuous or ostentatious, but in keeping with his character,—calm, deliberate, and resigned.

"His widow, who survived him by thirteen years, and died March 8, 1846, was endeared to her family and a numerous circle of friends by her benevolence, her unpretending piety and the undeviating sweetness of her disposition, qualities that cheered and brightened the closing years of his life.

"Both are buried in the old burying-ground in Norwich Town. Their portraits, painted by Fisher, are still preserved in the family."

Their gravestones bear the following inscriptions :

Daniel L. Coit.
Born September 20, 1756.
Died November 27, 1833.
Death bursts the involving cloud and all is day.

Elizabeth Coit.
Born May 14, 1767.
Died March 8, 1846.
Whose life evinced the sincerity of her christian profession, and whose death was cheered by an unwavering trust in a blessed immortality.

A well-known writer represents a traveler as weeping at the tomb of Adam because his great ancestor never knew him!

Not all of us are equal to all things at all times, but, if we shed no tears as we go with pansies and rosemary to our grandfather's grave in the old up-town burying-ground, we nevertheless hold him in pious memory, and indulge vain regrets that it was not our privilege to see him face to face, in his habit as he lived.

His eldest granddaughter, in a charming, familiar letter, recorded her impressions of him and his domestic life as she received them in her early childhood; and to his son's filial appreciation of his character it is superfluous to add a single word.

But this prolonged study of his life and the perusal of his correspondence continued for more than half a century, have brought us into

relations of such affectionate intimacy with him that his portrait, which has looked upon us benignantly all our days, is no longer paint and canvas but is transformed into a veritable, living personage.

We sit by his fireside, interested listeners, as he reads aloud to our grandmother, or tells of his long journeys in this and in foreign lands.

We walk with him in his gardens, his orchards and meadows, and accompany him in all weathers to "the landing," when the roads are rougher and the miles are longer than those that are known to most of the younger generation.

We see him riding away on his pony to visit his brothers at Canterbury or New London, or, seated with his wife in the old-fashioned chaise, on a leisurely journey to Hartford or New Haven.

At times we find him engrossed with affairs, yet always maintaining a quiet dignity that repels undue fa-

miliarity, and a gracious courtesy that wins and cements enduring friendships; and, finally, in an old age serenely bright, we see him beautifully exemplifying the traditional legend of his family

Virtus Sola Nobilitas.

W. C. G.